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DEPT FOR EAP AND EAP/CM
NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2033

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [HK](#)

SUBJECT: CHING CHEONG PAROLED, ARRIVES IN HONG KONG

REF: A. GUANGZHOU 000072
[B.](#) HONG KONG 004786
[C.](#) HONG KONG 003271

Classified By: E/P Section Chief Laurent Charbonnet; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) The PRC judiciary paroled on February 5 Ching Cheong, a Hong Kong-based journalist for The Straits Times in Singapore, after he completed about half of a five-year sentence for selling "state secrets" to Taiwan. Ching arrived back in Hong Kong the same day. (Note: Ching was first detained in April 2005 during a visit to Guangzhou, and was held for 16 months before his trial in a closed, Beijing court in August 2006. End note.) Ching's early release follows repeated calls from the Hong Kong government, as well as Hong Kong journalists, human rights activists and the international community. Ching has made no public appearances since his return to Hong Kong, but he published a hand-written (Chinese), open letter through the Hong Kong Journalist Association's website (www.hkja.org.hk) expressing his appreciation to the central and Hong Kong governments for his release and his happiness over being reunited with his family. Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang said he wished Mr. Ching well and hoped his family would be happy to spend the New Year with him.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Ching arrived via train in Hong Kong on February 5, just in time to celebrate the Chinese New Year, which begins on February 7. Ching's family, who was reportedly not notified of his release from prison until they received a call from him following his arrival in Hong Kong, welcomed his return. Ching's wife, Mary Lau, said Ching would rest and spend the Lunar New Year with family and friends, and his brother said that Ching is not expected to return to work soon. The conditions governing his release are not yet clear.

[¶3.](#) (C) Comment: Ching Cheong's unexpected but welcome release just before the Chinese New Year is good news to his family and to many others in Hong Kong, including Chief Executive Donald Tsang, who will likely receive a boost in local confidence following public recognition of his personal attention and behind-the-scenes pressure to get Ching released. Ching's early release, while perhaps a ploy by the central government to appear increasingly human in the months leading up to the Olympics, has rekindled a larger debate among local activists over Ching's arrest, conviction and imprisonment, including calls for the central government to define the term "state secrets," which journalists here fervently and openly criticize as an affront to press freedom for Hong Kong journalists who travel to the mainland. End Comment.
Cunningham